

February 5, 2015

Dear Committee Members:

My name is Jessica Reynolds and I am a speech-language pathologist (SLP) for the Helena School District. I am writing in favor of SB 192. This legislation would provide better speech and hearing services for patients across Montana and help health care professionals maintain their practices.

This legislation is targeted at allowing audiologists and SLPs to bill insurance for Evaluation and Management billing codes. During this time, the client's history is gathered and the patient is interviewed. This a crucial step in the diagnostic and treatment process. The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) that gathering a case history is fundamental, stating: "Understanding the views of clients and their families often determines the success of clinical interactions" (ASHA, 2007). It is through this portion of the diagnostic process that we begin to understand the scope of the patient's condition, how it impacts their lives, and how we can best help that individual.

Unfortunately, audiologists and SLPs are not compensated for this important aspect of the clinical process. When inquiries were made, representatives from the Montana Commissioner of Securities and Insurance stated that this was due to the fact that audiologists and SLPs were not represented on the Montana Freedom of Choice Act, which lists many health care professions from physicians to acupuncturists. Amending this law would allow audiologists and SLPs to receive insurance reimbursement and avoid shifting the costs onto their clients.

This legislation, however, would provide farther-reaching benefits for patients and health care professionals. Including audiologists and SLPs on this list may provide for more insurance coverage overall, extending benefits to thousands of Montanans who are denied care for hearing and communication because it is financially inaccessible. Additionally, it would allow SLPs and audiologists to continue to work in rural areas where they may not have a large patient base. This again trickles over to patients, who will not have to drive long distances to receive services, often in dangerous road conditions.

I urge you to support SB192. It will provide profound, positive benefits for patients, audiologists, and speech-language pathologists across Montana. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Jessica Reynolds, MS, MA, CFY-SLP  
Speech Language Pathologist